of oil exploitation, have visited the interior of Central Arabia and the coastal regions of Basra, Kuwait, or the Hedjaz. The independent principalities of Oman, however, and the vast desert of Rub-al-Khali to the south-west, are not so well known. Large tracts of this region, several hundred square miles in extent, have never been traversed. Not only no European, but, in some cases, no Arab, has trod their lonely sands. St. John Philby, who describes his experiences with Scriptural clarity in *The Empty Quarter*, did indeed cross the Rub-al-Khali from Dhufar to Qatar, but since this vast desert is almost a thousand miles wide, his remarkable journey cannot be regarded as adding more than a fragment to our minute knowledge of this 'lost world'. Since then, Allied pilots and, in one instance, Italians who set out from Eritrea to bomb Bahrein and Abadan but who never returned to their base, have flown over the Rub-al-Khali and have contributed some valuable reconnaissance photographs and survey records, but the desert from Salala to Muscat and from Muscat to Bahrein still holds secrets which may possibly remain untold for a century from now.

The region known as Oman lies in south-east Arabia between the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. In area it is about the size of Ireland. The inhabited portion extends from the Oman sultanate, north of Muscat, to the Tafurah desert in the west. The fort which was my headquarters at Sharjah, a small inland principality, was situated in what is known as the Trucial Oman Coast.

One normally thinks of the desert as being one vast expanse of sand, rather like the sandy plains of North Africa. In Oman this monotony of landscape is not so prevalent. From Ras-al-Khaimah, on the northern shore, to Muscat in the south, there runs a chain of mountains, in places fifty miles wide, with peaks rising to 8,000 feet. Mostly volcanic, they are composed of black basalt, igneous rocks and red sandstone, the different stratæ forming a picturesque *mise-en-scène* when viewed from the distance. Inland, especially in the winter months, the wadhis become foaming torrents and in the valleys the land is clothed in tender green; frankincense and acacia trees, broom and scented clover, yield a fragrance equal to the sweetest perfume of violets in a Devon lane. Then, scattered through this region in the vicinity of the wells, are large date plantations and village gardens verdant with pomegranate and fig trees. Even the desert itself could scarcely be termed barren, for it is mostly covered with various species of shrub and low, sap-filled plants of the stone-crop order. I have seen the most arid parts

suddenly merge into green as one walked over the sands, and come upon a copse of tamarisk and camel thorn, with moss and grass and occasionally a type of dandelion, growing in their shade.

To obtain a glimpse of this infinite variety of the desert, one should fly over it at two thousand feet. From this height one has an ideal panorama in which are focused mountain peaks of changing colour, shallow seas of pale jade green, and sands that vary from golden yellow to blood red.

My own entry into Arabia was by air. After two days' flight from Poole, with night-stops at Cairo and Bahrein Island, our Short Sunderland flying-boat crossed the Persian Gulf through thundery cumulus clouds and flew three hundred miles direct to Dubai, a busy town ten miles south-west of Sharjah. The mountains suddenly gave way to a long, narrow creek, and we skimmed the low-walled town to make a smooth landing between the marker buoys. From the air the open-roofed houses looked as though they had been bombed, the shadows giving the sharp relief of inked-in squares. The gardens of the merchants were gay with feathery palms, and in the creek and harbour scores of dhows, with awnings of palm-matting, lazily skimmed the surface.

Our four-engined aircraft was speedily moored to the buoy—an operation requiring some dexterity on the part of the first officer, who has to hook the ring at the top of the buoy as the aircraft slowly taxies up to it; if he misses, the flying-boat has to make a second circuit or else taxi to another buoy. The passenger launch was already half-way across the creek, with the sun-bronzed coxswain at the wheel. He was a Scot who had spent two years in the desert and had never had a day's illness. The clean lines and trim condition of the launch were impressive, as were the Arab serangs, clad in blue jerseys and wearing piratical caps, who stood in the stern like guardsmen. The engines were reversed to enable the launch to glide slowly under the wing, and careful hands grasped the flying-boat's hull to prevent bumping. The door was opened and as soon as the traffic officer had clambered aboard with his papers and diplomatic mail, we were ushered aboard the launch. Happily, there were none of the usual port formalities, for at Dubai there are no immigration, customs or passport requirements for air travellers.

As we chugged away from our silver-painted craft towards the tiny stone pier, I felt that we had suddenly drifted into another world —a world of azure, cloudless skies, pellucid green water, and soft,

a number of the camels which had been collected for safety at Dhaid while their owners were absent on a foray in the Batinah district.

In November, 1843, in consequence of an attack by Ghafalah on a Dubai caravan, Sheikh Maktum carried fire and sword into the country of that tribe and of the Na'im, who were allies of Sheikh Sultan-bin-Saqr, which led to a rupture between the two sheikhs. An inhabitant of Sharjah having been killed by the hand of a brother of Sheikh Maktum, a crisis again occurred, and again passed over harmlessly. Finally, a direct collision took place in the interior between the Ghafalah and the Sheikh of Dubai and several men were killed on either side. The Sheikh was victorious but lost the sight of one eye.

Petty tribal wars continued throughout the century. They were never on a large scale or serious enough to interfere with British interests in the Gulf, because the sheikhs were so jealous of one another that to combine was out of the question. The political game was played at its wiliest, and the practice of a sheikh was to play one ally off on another. If they had only acquired sufficient wisdom to settle their disputes amicably, co-operate on such matters as land reform, agriculture and water supply, the Oman Coast to-day might be a flourishing centre of Arab life. Instead of this, the major part of it is uncultivated desert, because the people have no incentive to irrigate the land and plant cereals and vegetables; that this can be done with considerable success is evidenced by the flourishing gardens at Sheikh's Wells and at Ras-al-Khaimah.

It has never been the policy of the sheikhs to better the lot of their subjects, however; as long as the people are unemployed for half the year, they can be relied upon to work hard at the pearl banks during the pearling season, and thus make enough money to carry them on for several months without working. It is a pernicious system, but the pearling-fleet owners argue that if the people were regularly employed on other occupations, such as agriculture or sheep rearing, they would have no desire to go to the pearl banks and the industry would languish for want of labour.

Another reason for the gradual cessation of tribal wars was the pearling industry, which is the most important feature of Arab life in the Gulf, and which necessitates the absence of a large proportion of the male inhabitants at the pearl fisheries during the two seasons of the year—April to June, and July to October. Since from

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

to land, and in not a single case were they taken prisoner; the sheikhs had declared war on Germany and they had their own traditional way of dealing with prisoners.

Khan Bahadur rendered invaluable service to the British during the many years that he held office as Residency and, apart from his successful efforts to eradicate enemy influence in the peninsula and ensure the loyalty of the tribes, he has always been a beneficent influence and has won respect and admiration for the Crown. His retirement from office in 1945 was a great loss to British interests in Oman, and there are many amongst those who were familiar with his work and influence who consider that his selfless service to the British Government should have been recognized by the honour of knighthood. He is an extremely simple man, however, and honours and titles have little appeal for him; he has retired quietly to his estates in Quwait, to cultivate his beautiful gardens, perhaps to write a book of reminiscences, and to dream of the days when his will and personality alone kept the tribes in subjection.

I had the privilege of knowing the Khan Bahadur well, as I was a frequent guest at his house on Sharjah creek, and a great deal of my knowledge of the Arab mind and culture was derived from the long talks we had together. The descendant of a Saiyed, that is, one who claimed descent from Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed, he was educated at a university in India and took a degree in law. Entering the Indian Civil Service, he held several important appointments under the Indian Government and was eventually posted to Oman as British Residency Agent, a post to which his tact and gifts of diplomacy were well suited. Although himself a rich man, Abdur bin Razzak was always conscious of the primitive condition of the Arab tribes of Oman; he invariably took the side of the poor man, and fought strenuously against the tyranny of the sheikhs and the attempts of the rich merchants to victimize the peasantry.

He had nothing but contempt for the meanness and extravagance of the sheikhs, and was often driven to vitriolic outbursts of scorn at their neglect of their subjects. In truth I think there was much of the idealist and reformer in his make-up, for he had Utopian visions of an Arabia in which the desert was scientifically irrigated, so that the valleys not only flourished with thriving date plantations, but were green with wheat fields and vegetable crops.

185 Before he took his leave from Sharjah, he implored me to send
311 him some catalogues of British firms giving details of agricultural machinery, as he was determined to experiment on his estates at Quwait and prove to his own satisfaction that the desert could be made to bloom. His own gardens at the Sheikh's Wells were alone an object lesson in vegetable growing under difficult climatic and soil conditions, and I believe that if he had been given a free hand in Oman the Arab population could have been made self-supporting. He could never understand why the British authorities would give no assistance to agricultural development, and insisted in exporting from India, even during the critical period of the war when transport was one of our greatest problems, cereals and other foods which could have been cultivated locally.

134 It must not be imagined that the growing of cereals and vegetables is an easy matter in Arabia. In Oman nine-tenths of the surface is composed of sand which, under analysis, reveals a
312 remarkable proportion of salt and acids. Much of the land is at sea level, or even below it, so that the well-water is salt and brackish and unfit for plants. Yet in the higher ground there is no limit to the number of wells which may be dug, provided suitable machinery is available. The subterranean water supply is limitless, being replenished during the heavy rains by streams and torrents which rush down from the mountains. Artesian wells which were drilled by the R.A.F. at Sharjah proved to the satisfaction of the engineers that even in the low-lying areas water can be found at economical depths.

312 A properly-controlled irrigation system would be a costly
241 proposition at the outset, requiring extensive equipment and power units; but once it were installed, with a sufficiency of reservoirs to retain the supplies and modern pumping installations to ensure an adequate flow to canalized areas, one of the main difficulties of desert cultivation would have been overcome. Scientific treatment of the soil is another essential consideration, and from experiments which I undertook at Sharjah, with the advice of the Government of India's Agricultural Department in the Sind, I am confident that with proper treatment of the soil, both with chemicals and locally-produced manures, practically anything which grows in the sandy regions of northern India or Iraq, could be grown equally well in Oman.

241 In the small garden at the Fort I have grown cabbages and tomatoes as large and succulent as any which pass through Covent

29:Dunn S-4 (1952)1952 MI Middle East
Hadhramaut - MM2
Oman MK1
Trucial Oman MK4
Qatar MK3
Kuwait MK1

a plateau. Except for a few oases the land is not cultivatable without the use of expensive irrigation facilities. The hills are not as high or as numerous and rainfall is not as heavy as in the areas to the west. The agriculture now consists mostly of grain and fruit crops and grazing. The half million people have not been able to subsist on the land, and they normally import substantial quantities of grain as well as staples against exports of fruits. No significant development is expected here in the near future.

THE TRUCIAL COAST

The land area along the Arabian side of the Persian Gulf from the Oman Gulf to the Qatar Peninsula known as the Trucial Coast is owned by a group of independent sheiks who have various treaties with the United Kingdom giving the British virtual control over the area. This coastline is over 400 miles long, but the country is very hot, arid, and sparsely settled. Agriculture presently is negligible and opportunities for future development are thought to be extremely limited. The great hope is that oil will be found along this coast as it has been in adjacent areas.

QATAR

Qatar, another sheikdom on the Persian Gulf which has a rather exclusive treaty with the British, is one of the oil kingdoms that has become immensely rich overnight. For this reason Qatar may become a thriving community but not an agricultural economy. The Qatar Peninsula is not very large (about 5 million acres) and is very hot, arid, sparsely settled, and, like the rest of the coast, not susceptible to any extensive agricultural development.

KUWAIT

Kuwait, the other independent coastal area on the Persian Gulf under British protectorate, is another newly-rich oil community. In fact, this is one of the largest of the oil-producing areas. Proven reserves are thought to be half as large as proven reserves in the United States. Oil royalties ($200 million annually) are being used for many community development projects including some in the agricultural field. But the small arid area (5 million acres) and limited population preclude any extensive agricultural development.

Table 48

ADEN PROTECTORATE: Acreage and Production of Principal Crops 1948 and 1949

District and Crops	1948 Acreage	1948 Production	1949 Acreage	1949 Production
	Acres	Metric Tons	Acres	Metric Tons
West Aden				
Millet and Sorghums	60,000	12,000	62,000	12,000
Other Small Millets	10,000	1,500	9,500	1,900
Wheat	1,500	750	1,500	750
Barley	4,500	2,000	4,500	2,000
Sesame	10,000	1,000	5,500	800
East Aden				
Millet and Sorghums	20,000	4,000	20,000	4,000
Other Small Millets	2,000	500	2,000	500
Wheat	2,500	2,500	2,000	2,500
Dates	10,000	5,500	10,000	5,500

SOURCE: Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations, United States Department of Agriculture.